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ABSTRACT

Middle-level principals are essential to current school reform initiatives. A study was undertaken to report what the respondents identified as the essential performance-based skills and knowledge needed for middle-level leadership, and to assess and project the impact of these knowledge and skill areas on administrator preparation programs. These issues were examined by surveying and interviewing middle-level principals about personal characteristics, job roles and tasks, and professional beliefs related to middle schools and the middle-school philosophy. Data were collected using surveys and semistructured interviews. Initially, surveys were sent to 125 middle-level principals in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Of these, 72 surveys were returned for data analysis. From the pool of survey respondents, 17 principals indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. An analysis of the qualitative data revealed that effective middle-level principals: (1) have a very positive outlook about their work, experience a high degree of job satisfaction, and view school problems as surmountable; (2) are more teacher-oriented; (3) are supportive of parent/community involvement in their schools; (4) have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; and (5) are intentional in their efforts to assemble, develop, and maintain a staff of dedicated educators who want to be in a middle school. Additionally, the analysis revealed that formal education in educational administration appeared to have no bearing on middle-level principals' effectiveness, and that levels of participation in professional associations appeared to be unrelated to principal effectiveness. (Contains 43 references.) (MLF)

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Middle Level Leadership for the 21st Century:

Principals' Views on Essential Skills and Knowledge:

Implications for Successful Preparation

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Middle Level Leadership for the 21st Century

Principals' Views on Essential Skills and Knowledge:

Implications for Successful Preparation

Introduction

"Almost all educational reform reports have come to the conclusion that the nation cannot attain excellence in education without effective school leadership" (Crawford, 1998, p.8). We know that effective school leaders: (1) recognize teaching and learning as the main business of school, (2) communicate the school's mission and vision clearly and consistently to all constituents, (3) promote an atmosphere of trust and collaboration, and (4) emphasize professional development (see Bauck, 1987; George & Grebing, 1992; Weller, 1999). Despite the consensus that leadership counts, deep philosophical and political disagreements remain about what kind of educational leaders are needed, what knowledge and skills they should possess, and how they should be professionally prepared. Many policymakers, for example, criticize the preparation of school administrators in colleges and universities as outmoded and ineffective, unable to address adequately the complexities of school leadership.

As middle level education moves into the 21st century new questions need to be asked and old ones revisited. Middle level principals are essential to current school reform initiatives; yet rhetoric about their importance is often unaccompanied by sufficient attention to the new knowledge and skills they will need or how they might acquire these to forward a contemporary, complex reform agenda. Emphasizing this renewed interest in the role of the principal, Olson (2000) noted:

> After years of work on structural changes, standards and testing and ways of holding students and schools accountable, the education policy world has turned its attention to the people charged with making the system work.... But nowhere is the focus on the human element in public education more prevalent than in the renewed recognition of the importance of strong and effective leadership. (p. 1)

The purposes of this study were: (1) to report what the respondents in this study identified as the essential performance-based skills and knowledge needed for middle level leadership in the 21st century; and (2) to assess and project the impact of these knowledge and skill areas on administrator preparation programs. This study examined these issues by surveying and interviewing middle level principals about personal characteristics, job roles and tasks, and professional beliefs related to middle schools and the middle school philosophy.

Review of Literature

There is a lack of research focused on the middle level principalship. Between 1981 and 1983 the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) conducted a national study of the middle level principalship which resulted in two publications, The Middle Level Principalship, Volume I, A Survey of Middle Level Principals and Programs and The Middle Level Principalship, Volume II, The Effective Middle Level Principal. Analyzing the data from these two studies, Bauck (1987) attempted to determine the differences and similarities between typical and effective middle level principals. He concluded that while effective middle level principals are teacher oriented and encourage parent and community involvement in the school, they do not feel that formal education or participation in professional organizations have contributed to their success (see Table 3 in the concluding discussion for a more complete list of his findings). Since 1983 no large scale studies have been undertaken.

In 1999 Valentine, Maher, Quinne, and Irvin noted that the role of the principal has shifted noticeably in the 20th century. More importantly they wrote, "As the principalship moves into a new millennium, characterizing the principalship with a few key words is more difficult than ever" (p.56). With this in mind, we review the literature on the middle level principal to establish the key roles that principals have played to this point in time. Basically, this literature sets forth ideas about the functions and personal nature of effective middle level principals as well as connecting principal leadership to school change.

Kilcrease (1995), in her study of middle level principals, concluded that administrators performed three broad functions that enabled them to be successful: (1) providing a program especially adapted to diverse student needs, (2) promoting continuity of education, and (3) introducing needed innovations in curriculum and instruction. In addition, middle level administrators must have the skills to ensure that teaming and shared decision making processes work well in the school (George & Grebing, 1992) and perception about the attitudes and leadership skills among their teaching staff (Whittaker & Valentine, 1993). Not surprisingly, several theorists and researchers assert that middle level principals should be knowledgeable about young adolescents, their development, and their learning styles (Eichorn, 1987; George, 1990; Schmidt, 1998). Of course, the reform literature also strongly advocates that middle level principals possess a special set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

The literature about the personal nature of middle level principals is not usually research based; however, it sets forth such expectations as personal confidence (Rubinstein, 1990), trustworthiness (Tarter, 1995), and instructional leadership. The latter

category is best explained by Williamson (1991) who defined the role of the middle level principal as an inspirational leader, human resource developer, and change agent. The principal must help develop and convey the school vision, work with students, teachers, support staff, parents and the community to improve the school. Middle level principals must be able to inspire others to strive for excellence.

Neufeld (1997) asserted that middle level principals, especially those in urban schools, can reform schools if they transform themselves from managers to leaders along with learning new knowledge and skills. Montgomery (1995) concurs that principals working with teachers can make great changes. "If only the principal will grow, the school will grow. To change something, someone has to change first" (Barth, 1985, p.92). Middle level principals must be catalysts for change if middle level schools are to meet the varied and diverse needs of young adolescents.

Hipp (1997) extends the idea of principal and teacher collaboration and makes suggestions for principals to reinforce teacher efficacy. These suggestions include, among others: (1) modeling behavior, (2) promoting teacher empowerment and decision making, (3) managing student behavior, (4) creating a positive climate for success, and (5) inspiring caring and respectful relationships.

Responsibilities of a 21st century middle level principal are complex and far-reaching; however, middle level principals must ensure that young adolescents do not face what Turning Points refers to as the possibility of a "diminished future" (Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, 1989, p.8)

Performance Standards for Administrators

Many professional organizations have developed performance standards that are meant to govern the work of school administrators. A careful examination of these organizations' standards reveals an amazing consistency in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions characteristic of effective school administrators. The first widely distributed set of preparation guidelines/standards for administrators was released in 1983 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). In 1993 the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) published Principals for Our Changing Schools which outlined 21 knowledge and skill domains deemed essential for effective school leadership. In 1996 the work of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) came to the forefront and is presently being adopted by state agencies around the country. Its standards for school administrators were built around the premise that good leaders are those who can improve teaching and learning.

Of all of the national organizations that focus on school administration issues it appears that only one has focused its attention on middle schools. In 1986 (revised 1991 and 1997) the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published Elementary and Middle Schools Proficiencies for Principals. NAESP recognized that middle level schools are extremely complex organizations that require a wide range of leadership proficiencies. This professional organization also noted that "trends toward school-based management, shared decision making, and a more intense focus on student performance...require school leaders to acquire new skills" (p.1).

While NAESP notes that it is unrealistic to expect that all principals will possess all of the proficiencies cited in their report, an outstanding principal is characterized by

96 proficiencies. According to this list of proficiencies the outstanding middle level principal: (1) involves the school community in identifying and accomplishing the school's mission; (2) recognizes the individual needs and contributions of all staff and students; (3) applies effective interpersonal skills; (4) conducts needs assessments; (5) advances the profession through participation in professional organizations, (6) uses active listening skills, (7) works to build consensus; (8) understands group dynamics; (9) maintains a visible presence in the classroom; (10) engages the staff in the study of effective teaching practices; (11) uses both formative and summative evaluation skills; (12) uses collaborative planning to identify objectives that accomplish the school's mission; (13) develops and implements effective schedules; (14) understands the school district budget and its implications for the school; and (15) uses effective strategies to deal with political forces that affect the school (Proficiencies for Principals, 1997, excerpted from p.3).

In addition to these proficiencies NAESP also identified four prerequisites for success as an elementary and middle level leader. These include: (1) advanced understanding of the teaching and learning processes; (2) thorough understanding of child growth and development; (3) broad base of knowledge, including a solid background in liberal arts; and (4) sincere commitment to educational equity and excellence at all levels for all children (Proficiencies for Principals, 1997, excerpted from p.3).

Methodology

This study of middle level principals employed a dominant-less dominant research design (Creswell, 1994) with qualitative methods as the dominant paradigm. This study is part of a larger research project on middle level principalship, designed to

explore and further the knowledge base related to the nature of the middle level principalship. Research questions included: (1) What are the essential skills and knowledge identified by middle level principals for school leadership in the 21st century?, and (2) When, where, and how do middle level principals obtain these performance-based skills and knowledge?

Data Collection

Data were collected using surveys and semi-structured interviews. Initially surveys were sent to 125 middle level principals in the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. With the support of school superintendents and intermediate unit leaders, 72 surveys were returned for data analysis. The surveys gathered information related to the principals': (1) educational, professional, and personal background; (2) knowledge of middle school philosophy; (3) experience with school reform and change; (4) attitudes toward parent involvement in school; (5) and knowledge of special education issues.

The survey contained both open and closed-ended questions. Responses, which were scaled, were then analyzed using descriptive statistics. Unscaled (open-ended) responses were clustered into themes or categories. The descriptive statistics, used throughout the analysis, help confirm the findings.

From the pool of survey respondents, 17 principals indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. Eight of these seventeen principals work in schools recognized as "blue ribbon" schools by the U.S. Department of Education. It is important to note that the seventeen interviewees are highly representative of the larger sample of survey respondents with regard to gender, age, experience, race/ethnicity, prior school

experience, and the like. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed the middle level principals to expand upon their survey responses, discuss more freely what it means to be a middle level principal, and to explain their understanding of effectiveness in relation to middle level leadership. The researchers attempted to follow the dictates of phenomenological interviews, "to let them [middle level principals] tell us what we need to know rather than to ask them what we think, a priori, we would like to know" (Pollio, 1991, p.4). The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for purposes of analysis.

Research Context

Keefe, Clark, Nickerson and Valentine (1983) described the typical effective principal as "a man...between the ages of 45 and 54 who has spent 10 to 14 years as a principal, 9 to 11 of which have been in his current school. The effective principals appear to be older and more experienced than the norm for middle level principals. They spend more time in professional growth activities...and are active in professional associations" (p.11). The typical middle level principal in this study is a white male (85%), 48 years of age who holds a master's degree (79%) obtained in the 1970s and 1980s (79%). He is a seasoned educator with 13 years of teaching experience and prior administrative experience as an assistant principal (74%). He is certified on the secondary level (62%).

Seventy percent of the principals who participated in this study are members of NASSP with only 37% belonging to the National Middle School Association (NMSA). Fifty-four percent are committed to administering a middle school for no longer than five years. When assessing the responses of the participants in this study it is important to note that neither Pennsylvania nor New Jersey recognizes middle school certification for

school administrators. According to the laws in each state, a principal who is licensed at either the elementary or secondary levels may administer a middle school. A more complete portrait of the sample used in this study is available in Table 1.

Table 1: Portrait of Participating Middle Level Principals
(n=72)

RACE ETHNICITY	• White 61 (85%) • Black 4 (6%) • Hispanic 1 (1%) • Not Reported 6 (8%)			
GENDER	• Male 54 (75%)		• Female 18 (25%)	
AGE	Range= 28-65 years Mean= 48 years			
HIGHEST DEGREE	• MA MS 31 (43%) • MEd 26 (36%) • EdD 13 (18%) • PhD 2 (3%)			
YEAR OF DEGREE	1960s 2 (3%)	1970s 28 (39%)	1980s 29 (40%)	1990s 13 (18%)
CERTIFICATION	• Secondary 62%		• Elementary 38%	
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	Range=2.5-25 years Mean=13 years			
PRIOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE	• Assistant Principal 55 (77%) • Administrative Experience 5 (7%) • Curriculum Specialist 5 (7%) • No Prior Administrative Experience 7 (9%)			
ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE IN YEARS	Range= 1-31 years Mean= 9 years Mode= 1 year (8 respondents)			
TENURE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL APPOINTMENT	• 1-3 Years: 12 (17%) • 4-5 Years: 33 (46%) • 6-10 Years: 12 (16%) • 10+ Years: 15 (21%)			
FORMAL MIDDLE SCHOOL TRAINING	No 39 (54%)		Yes 33 (46%)	
MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	• NASSP 50 (70%) • ASCD 43 (60%) • NMSA 27 (37%) • STATE MSA 17 (24%)			

The typical middle school in this study was public, included grades six through eight, and was located in a suburban setting. As noted in Table 2, principals reported

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widespread use of teaming, interdisciplinary teaching, transition programs, exploratory curriculum, and block/flexible scheduling.

Table 2: Middle School Demographics
(n=72)

SCHOOL LOCATION	Suburban 54 (75%)	Urban 15 (21%)	Rural 3 (4%)	
GRADE CONFIGURATION	6-8 47 (65%)	5-8 11 (16%)	7-8 8 (11%)	7-9 6 (8%)
TYPE OF SCHOOL	Public 72 (100%)	Private 0 (0%)	Other 0 (0%)	
MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED	• Teaming 66 (92%) • Interdisciplinary Teaching 64 (89%) • Transition Programs 57 (79%) • Exploratory Curriculum 53 (74%) • Block/Flexible Scheduling 43 (60%) • Advisory 26 (36%)			

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began with repeated readings of the transcripts and the compilation of survey results. Each researcher read and reread the data to identify "the repetitive refrains, the persistent themes" (Lightfoot, 1983, p.15), to code the data according to these emerging themes, and to make sense of the whole in terms of the context. The five researchers involved in this project met to discuss and debate their individual interpretations of the data. Themes were compared and tested against the data collected. Wasser and Bresler (1996) noted that processes such as those we followed involve "multiple viewpoints...held in dynamic tension" (p.6) and referred to this process as the "interpretive zone." After much discussion the seven themes that are presented in this study emerged, meeting the test of honoring the middle level principals' experiences.

Readers will notice the code (see Appendix A) used to identify the source of each verbatim interview account (i.e., 01WM-50/17-6/8S80). Translated this code means: Interviewee #1 is a white male who is 50 years old with 17 years of administrative

experience. He works in a sixth through eighth grade middle school that is located in a suburban area with a faculty of 80 teachers.

Integrity of Data and Analysis

To help ensure the internal validity or dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of our results, we used triangulation of interview and survey data, the presentation of verbatim quotes, the use of multiple researchers (and coders), audit trails (Merriam, 1988), and member checks. The themes presented in this article were "member checked" by six of the seventeen principals interviewed.

Analysis: Leadership for the 21st Century and the Middle School Principal

An analysis of the qualitative data revealed that effective middle level principals: (1) have a very positive outlook about their work, experience a high degree of job satisfaction, and view school problems as surmountable; (2) are more teacher-oriented, as evidenced by their concern for providing teachers with planning time and professional development; (3) are supportive of parent/community involvement in their schools; (4) have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; and (5) are intentional in their efforts to assemble, develop, and maintain a staff of dedicated educators who want to be in a middle school. Additionally, the analysis revealed that formal education in educational administration appeared to have no bearing on middle level principal effectiveness, and that levels of participation in professional associations appeared to be unrelated to principal effectiveness. The analysis that follows develops each of these themes more fully.

Middle Level Leadership for the 21st Century:

Essential Skills & Knowledge

A Positive Outlook: High Job Satisfaction

Effective middle level principals express a positive outlook and a high degree of job satisfaction (Clark & Clark, 1994). Respondents to this study were no exception, they expressed their enjoyment in working with young adolescents as well as a positive attitude toward meeting what many characterized as the "challenge" of serving as the principal of a middle school. For example, one experienced suburban principal said, "It's exciting to see [students] enter adolescence and change from children to adults. . . . Change is something big in the life of middle school youngsters. They're going through this change, and we have to know that and appreciate that" (14WM--56/06--6/9S90). Similar sentiments were expressed by all respondents.

Even when they discussed adolescents as a "tough age group," responses were softened with statements about the principals' excitement about the challenge and/or empathy for students' developmental difficulties. For example, principals said:

> You need a different kind of parameter for the middle school so that you make sure it turns out right for them. Great opportunity to present them with successes. I just think there is just a lot of energy and a lot of willingness and readiness to learn. (09BF--50/05--6/8S80)

> For me personally, I think that the kids are most challenging at this age...they're very impulsive; they're very self-centered, and they can be cruel to each other and to adults at times, and I think it's a neat age to work with and try to get them to understand what they're doing, how they're doing it, and look at themselves and see if they can do it a better way. (03WM--45/13--7/8R25)

> In our urban school, we do a lot of proactive work through our curriculum....Plus we have a lot of intervention work through the team. Mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues....So you have to take the lay of the land and figure out "are we meeting the needs of the kids?' and sort of mold your kids in a certain direction. (04BM--49/09--6/8U50)

> You can fully appreciate what the kids are going through and just help them. You know, be emphathetic, not judgmental; don't take things personally. You're there to help them grow. (13WM--62/28--6/8S60)

Virtually without exception, the respondents were future oriented and expressed hopes, dreams, and goals for the future of their school. They recognized that change sometimes must be incremental, and they expressed patience and a willingness to let important changes come about over time. Interestingly, when these principals talked about missing components of middle level education (i.e., advisories, transition programs, interdisciplinary teaching) and/or less-than-ideal district support, they characterized what could be considered negatives as opportunities for improvement rather than obstacles to success. For example, one first-year principal in an urban school said,

> If you look at parent involvement as having PTO meetings and how many people show up to sell candy at a fundraiser, then [our school] is horrendous . . .but we have a great degree of communication back and forth with parents. And we, for the most part, get nothing but full cooperation and full compliance with parents in regard to school and trying to get their kids squared away and be successful in school. So, in that respect, I think we have fantastic parent involvement. (05WM--48/01--6/8U45)

They talked with enthusiasm of the principal's role as provider of encouragement and motivator of teachers and students. When asked what makes leadership at the middle level distinctive, respondents cited the belief that they had made a difference for the school, students, and teachers. Many expressed their belief that a healthy sense of humor was a necessary ingredient in successful middle level leadership. In addition, their frequent choice of plural pronouns reflected a positive sense of connectedness with others in the school. Responses to questions were peppered with phrases such as "we decided," "our culture is," and "we are prepared to."

These principals were complimentary and supportive of their teaching staffs. As one principal said, "Good things are happening in the classroom" (09BF--50/05--6/8S0). Another principal (14WM--56/06--6/9S90), in explaining that "our teachers care about the kids," listed more than a dozen activities throughout the school year designed to heighten collegiality and foster positive relationships. Others demonstrated similar support by saying:

> ...maybe comfort teachers in knowing that the things they are doing aren't necessarily wrong but if you can apply them a little differently they can be effective. (12WM--41/05--7/9S75)

> If a teacher wants to come in and tell me what they think or what their concerns are, I'll take the time to listen to them. If I'm going down the hall and somebody says, 'I need to talk to you about this,' I'll say, 'do you have the time right now?' and we'll do it right there. (15WM--51/03--7/9S60)

> There's a real human side to change, too. You have to be really respectful of the culture and the traditions. So, it's a balance of all that. I think the key to change is understanding the culture and working to create the culture that you want. (11WF--35/04--6/8S50)

In short, this group of principals shared a high degree of personal optimism. One individual actually espoused optimism as a personal leadership philosophy. "You've got to surround kids with optimism. It's the only way. Any person learns best when they are surrounded with optimism" (07WM--46/05--7/8S60). By far, the majority of these principals worked to generate optimism in others through celebrations and other forms of appreciation.

Teacher Orientation

Almost every principal in this study was oriented toward hiring student-centered teachers who are interested in both the young adolescents and the content areas they teach. Among the essential elements of a middle school, This We Believe (1995), the

official position paper of the National Middle School Association, includes educators knowledgeable and committed to young adolescents and a curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents as two of the ten fundamentals of middle schools. The survey used in this study asked the principals to list university courses important for middle school teachers. Their top three responses were teaching methods for the middle school (54%), psychology of the middle level student (49%), and developmentally appropriate curriculum (42%). Whether based on research findings or on their tacit knowledge, principals clearly indicated a need for middle level teachers to understand the students they taught as well as to understand how to best approach curriculum in the middle level classroom.

The NASSP Middle Level Council, which published An Agenda for Excellence (1989), calls for student development, curriculum for middle level students, appropriate learning and instruction, client centeredness, and specifically trained teachers. In their own words, principals noted many of the tenets of the Agenda. For example, one principal responded that he

> appreciates teachers who provide the best practices, allow kids to get up, to think, to use higher order thinking skills, to get away from rote memory activities, to get their hands dirty and to create an environment where youngsters can really flourish. (13WM--62/28--6/8S60)

These are the teachers who meet the students' needs and work well with young adolescent learners. Another principal similarly listed the characteristics important for middle school teachers as "high energy, to be able to sell the subject, to make it relevant, and to have a clear interest in youngsters" (16WM--54/20--6/9S55).

This We Believe (1995) additionally calls for cooperative planning among a team of middle level teachers. The common planning time allows teachers to plan

interdisciplinary units and to discuss the ways to best meet the needs of the students. Principals addressed this issue by indicating that their schools were structured so teachers were able to meet everyday with a common planning time. Listen to what they had to say:

> A common group of teachers with a common group of students is critical. Without that what you have is a mini-model of a high school. (01WM--50/17--6/8S80)

> They (teachers) have double planning. We arranged the schedule so the guidance counselors meet with them (the teachers) once a week. The administrators meet with the teams once a week, so we can talk about the kids and the curriculum. (09BF--50/05--6/8S80)

> That gives them the facility, the opportunity, for lots of conversation about what is happening in their classrooms. (08BF--47/01--6/8S60)

Another element of a good middle school according to This We Believe (1995) is advisement and counseling programs for young adolescents. Whether they were familiar with the research or had observed practices that work, principals commented on the need for advisory and counseling opportunities. A fairly new principal concluded, "They need to be caring, to be understanding, and empathetic; they need to have the skills to instruct in a classroom setting that makes the best use of students of this age group and their personality types" (12WM--41/05--7/9S75). Principals were concerned about their interactions with teachers and stressed the need to hire what they called "good," student-centered teachers.

> A good teacher--caring nurturing person--loves kids. I feel that is as important as content. If there's a question, always err on the side that it's the adult's responsibility, and when a kid is ready to accept, you'll know and they'll know. You won't have to dictate it to them, and you'll that they take it naturally. (07WM--46/05--7/8S60)

> You (the principal) have to be attuned to the needs of the students and the teachers because the teachers need to know how to address the middle school students. Teachers have to have knowledge of content, high vitality, be reflective, and reach beyond. They have high expectations for the kids. They're willing to reach beyond by constantly learning more so that they can better affect learning in the classroom. They're open to change. (17WF--44/03--6/8U55)

> We look at responses in their essays for their belief in a seamless curriculum for the kids, and the integration of subject matter, obviously that thematic approach. We are heterogeneously grouped; they have to address all the learners' needs in this setting. I am looking for people that have a work ethic for kids. I guess very child-centered is important. That's why we're here. (11WF--35/04--6/8S50)

> ... having a young human being in front of them...that's the whole piece there. They understand what the kid is going through, especially in middle school terms of what they're going through in their growth and maturation right now. (15W--51/03--7/9S60)

Other principals discussed the need for caring teachers committed to young adolescents. "Caring; knowledge of their subject, and I'd love a teacher who'd say, 'kids are always first in my class'" (15WM--51/03--7/9S60). Another principal viewed successful teachers as, "Well, number one is they have to have a child-centered orientation. They have to care about kids. There's got be a real caring concern" (14WM--56/06--6/9S90). Other principals made very poignant comments regarding the teachers they saw as best suited for middle level learners. They used words like flexibility, creativity, sense of humor and a love of children to describe strong middle level teachers. Similarly, others stressed what they saw as important:

> I'd say the number one quality is to identify the individual differences of the kids, be able to modify your program to meet those individual needs. At the middle level you deal with extremes, and you need to adjust, accommodate, and accept those things. (05WM--48/01--6/8U45)

> Concern for students as people, concern for academic progress, openness to changing the plan. If it is not working and being able to take a risk to do something different with that kid, willingness to make accommodations and adaptations, to get out of the box so we're not teaching the same old way, and to really connect kids with the learning. (06WF--48/03--6/8U65)

> In addition, somebody who is organized, somebody who has strong subject skills, and I think somebody who really understands middle level. That is somebody who has a lot of patience. Somebody who can laugh at themselves as well at the children. Somebody who can really know when to set limits and hold to those limits (fair limits), and by the way, I think this is true for an administrator, too. (02WF--54/12--5/8R35)

> I look for the individual to have some type of magnetic personality, that's going to be able to...that you can sense is going to bring some excitement to the kids and the classroom. I look for the sparkle in their eyes. You look for some ability to communicate both orally and verbally in terms of writing. Now you look for the ability to think with some creative intelligence. (10WM--58/18--7/8S60)

Overall, the principals in this study focused on teachers and their abilities to positively educate the "whole" student, not just the academic side. Principals stressed the need for middle level teachers to be strong in content areas and in the context of teaching the young adolescent. According to these principals, teachers with a commitment to excellence and a positive attitude toward young adolescents were the best teachers for middle schools.

Desire to Involve Parents and Community

The needs for enhanced and meaningful parental involvement and community connection seem to be among the least controversial areas in public education. One challenge facing middle schools is the decreasing parent involvement as students progress from the elementary grades to the middle grades (Epstein, 1992).

Middle level administrators appear to be in universal agreement that the involved parent leads to a more successful school-home relationship. Parent involvement increases clarity in communication and allows a first-hand exposure to the middle school culture. Middle level principals report that students of involved parents show evidence in varying ways of the value behind and beyond the connection:

> So when you bring the parents in, there is first of all...you break down the miscommunication. And secondary, they get to see and experience what the school is all about and...we have nothing to hide. (05 WM--48/01--6/8 U45)

> Our parents who are here on the formal and informal levels are, almost without exception, the parents of children who are in the top ten, the top twenty, or top thirty of our classes. (06 WF--48/03--6/8 U65)

> The parent who's involved in their child's education and who knows what's going on, that child generally will be doing better in school...Their kids generally have a better connection to school..., are they always better in achievement? Not necessarily. But I think the parent who knows what is going on has a better understanding when they... ask questions. (15WM--51/03--7/9 S60)

As the student enters early adolescence, the parent increasingly loses touch with the school, hence with their education. The solution seems to lie in giving new and creative definitions to school and community involvement. Reaching beyond the traditional PTO, school newsletter, open house, and parent conferences we find such techniques as a "help" solicitation form to be completed by parents; "if you want to help us out, here are the things you can do...we get about three or four hundred of these back...it gives us a database and that's how we get parents involved" (15WM--51/03--7/9 S60) and one that builds upon diversity for involvement, "...our team...geography program...built on multi-cultural...ten or twelve parents a day...with different things...to share from their culture" (O6WF--48/03--6/8 U65).

A successful strategy mentioned in numerous surveys was to invite and include parents in the middle school teams:

> ...let parents know we're a team here...it's not us and them. This is a community process, a community building. They are part of the team...if your child is in the sixth grade, you can sit in a sixth grade level meeting and hear what's going on. (13WM--62/28--6/8 S60)

Even when a school endorses the notion of a PTO or a newsletter, the middle school program that speaks to parents can enhance broader participation:

> We got away from just having a business meeting...started to theme...had a guest speaker come in and talk about a subject specific to middle level needs, and that attracted parents. (07WM--46/05--7/8 S60)

While the need for parent and community involvement remains indisputable, the solution calls for new and creative solutions. Parents will stand for no less than meaningful involvement. Principals are increasingly sensitive to the value of parent involvement; "I suspect if we don't have broad family support, or (in turn) broad student accountability to their families, we lose" (10WM--58/18--7/8 S60).

Tolerance for Ambiguity and Uncertainty

Literature on leadership suggests that effective middle level principals exhibit a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Goodman & Associates, 1986; Neufeld, 1997; Wheatley, 1992). Almost without exception the middle level principals interviewed for this study supported this finding--a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty when working to effect change, addressing conflicting needs, and/or responding to conflicting priorities.

Veteran principals talked about comfort with uncertainty as a strategy for bringing about change. Other self-described risk-takers try to encourage teachers to take the power that is offered to them and work to provide a role model by taking chances with their supervisors. They believe that this helps teachers become more willing to take chances and build a risk-taking mentality. Several principals mentioned that in order to encourage teachers to engage in decision making, administrators must be willing to live with the results of their deliberations.

> You listen; you meet as a group, and then you make a decision and you take a risk as the principal. You implement, and if it doesn't work, you have to take it back to be willing to stand by your mistake and make the necessary changes. (02WF--54/12--5/8R35)

> ...trying to show teachers that I was willing to hang myself out there and make a commitment to things that had to get done. (07WM--6/05--7/8S60)

> We invite everyone into the conversations, and I'm willing to live with what that group or committee decides. (12WM--41/05--7/9S75)

The participants in this study had a high degree of agreement when describing flexibility as a quality of a middle level principal in the 21st century. "I think they have to be flexible. Flexibility is the name of the game. . . . It takes trying something different every day.... Anything can happen, any day, that makes you have to throw those plans to the wind and try something different" (09BF--50/05--6/8S80).

Others explained that flexibility extends to a variety of areas:

> It would help that people would see that the ability to be very flexible and to have some spontaneity in the school is a wonderful thing for the students. (02WF--54/12--5/8R35)

> You have to be flexible; you [as principal] have to have a schedule that provides an opportunity for the teachers to be flexible and do what they feel needs to be done at the time... like a juggler; you have to juggle your activities and provide a nice balanced program for your youngsters. (14WM--56/06--6/9S90)

In addition, several participants mentioned the need to accept different ideas and acknowledge different (and sometimes conflicting) needs of student, parents, teachers, and/or governing boards. A third-year principal also shared the juggling metaphor:

> You juggle a lot of balls when you're an administrator. First of all, I think you have the trouble of finding out who your public really is. Is it the kid? Is it the parent? Is it the teacher? Is it the superintendent or the school board? You're trying to satisfy four or five different publics. You have to learn the balances; it's a balancing act. (15WM--51/03--7/9S60)

<u>To Assemble, Develop, and Maintain a Dedicated Staff</u>

What characterizes an effective middle school teacher? There seems to be little substantive research available related to characteristics of effective middle level

educators. The paucity of teachers professionally prepared specifically for middle school is compounded by the reality that middle school emphasized teacher preparation programs and advanced degree programs for leadership are few (NMSA, 1997). Although there is apparent agreement as to the need for content-strengthened preparation programs for middle school teachers, principals still appear quite divided as to the desirability of secondary/content prepared candidates in contrast to those prepared as elementary teachers. When an administrator is fortunate enough to have involvement at the initial stages of assembling and staffing a quality middle school, it is important to identify their focus beyond the generalized agreement of content strength within the preparation of the candidate?

Personal qualities take a prominent role when principals identify a strong candidate among choices for a middle school staff. As noted by two principals:

> ...I look for the individual to have some type of magnetic personality...that you sense is going to bring some excitement to the kids and the classroom....I look for that sparkle....sometimes it's the quite kind of motivation. (11WF--35/04--6/8 S50)

> High energy...ability to sell the subject...make it relevant...you're in the classroom...hallways...at their events...you understand that one day...they may love you and they may dislike you the next for no apparent reason...even though they (the prospective middle school teacher) may know the subject you hire them more on their personality as much as their subject...Personality characteristic is very, very important for a middle school teacher. (16WM--54/20--6/9 S55)

Upon exploring the challenges of both developing and maintaining a dedicated staff we find a variety, but yet recurring, number of recommendations stated by principals. The organization that nurtures teacher empowerment and the teaming concept are approaches frequently mentioned:

> Team organization lends itself...to empowerment because they're kind of self-led. So a team of four (teachers) function(s)...they take care of their discipline...of

> their kids...decisions for their team...so right there you have a different mind set. (11WF--35/04--6/8 555)

Teacher empowerment appears to take root in gradual steps that set the stage for even more professional growth:

> ...empower teachers as much as possible...We have a school improvement planning groups now. Every teacher is on it...get them to see that they do have the power to change their class, team, school , then go from there...I don't think I've said "no" to a teacher (generated) project this year. (06WF--48/03--6/8U65)

The value of professional development, in various formats, is consistently endorsed by principals—so long as the focus is upon meaningful application and input by those involved:

> I think in-services are absolutely critical...if it's a one shot deal, and there's no other follow-up, then it's going to be lost... seek opportunities for all teachers to go out and experience as much as they can...it's complicated we need time to interact around progress. When teachers see other teacher experiencing success in the same type of demographic arena, that is the best motivation for them to pursue it....I think a lot of the best professional development is for, to give teachers time to work together...be able to think about what they are doing. (15WM--51/03--7/9S60)

Open communication and witnessing a principal as a team member goes far in establishing a bond of trust in the middle school environment. A skilled middle level leader has in balance the quantifiable preparation for success in combination with security in making judgement calls and initiative reactions.

Middle Level Leadership for the 21st Century:

The When, Where and How of Principal Preparation

In addition to the essential skills necessary for leadership are the unanswered questions of "when, where, and how" these middle level leaders acquire the positive outlook, teacher orientation, community involvement, high tolerance for ambiguity, and

inspiring dedication necessary in order to lead today's middle schools. The final section of this analysis documents what our sample of middle level principals said regarding their administration preparation programs and the role of professional organizations in support of their development as school administrators.

Educational Administration Preparation Programs

General Leadership Preparation. The purpose of most educational administration programs is to produce school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and commitment to assure student success while increasing the level of academic expectations and performance for all students. But the efficacy of graduate preparation in educational administration is relatively unstudied. In 1997 Haller, Brent, and McNamara noted that "overall, our reading of the limited literature on this subject suggests that there is little evidence that graduate training increases the effectiveness of school managers" (p.224).

According to the remarks of the interviewees for this study, formal preparation did not influence their acquisition of essential skills. Even though two-thirds of the principals surveyed received their graduate training in educational administration, many described their programs as inadequate, impractical, and unrealistic. Several commented about the lack of reflective, personal preparation.

> Again, I don't think a whole lot of time or effort was spent on the personal side of understanding what's involved in being a principal and dealing with people. It was a lot of theory and not a whole lot of practical application. (03WM--45/13--7/8R25)

> Again, I'm not certain about certification. I don't know how much you really learn from courses, you'll forgive me...I have two masters degrees in education, one's in curriculum and instruction and one is in instructional leadership, and I'm not really certain how much one learns from being in the classroom, reading all the research. (08BF--47/01--6/8S60)

> I think people need to get out and need the opportunity to see what the job's about, maybe a little more job shadowing...Sit and talk about what I do and observe what I do in this building. When I was in training there wasn't any of that...they need to get in and see what the job's all about. (15WM--51:03--7:9S60)

According to Scales (1992), preparation that enables prospective middle level educators to "understand early adolescent development but not to be responsive to it" (p.65) is futile. Responsible leaders therefore need to engage in the process of self-reflection and discernment, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, to examine their experiences, and to determine if they are in the right place. They need to construct and or reconstruct core ideas about their role and, therefore, how they should spend their time, set their priorities, seek new knowledge and skill, and situate themselves with respect to teachers and others in the educational community.

In their desire to become facilitators of students' learning, today's middle level principals need to rethink their conceptions of content, pedagogy, and assessment. As a result, Zehm (1999) believes that there is a critical need for education programs to emphasize the "personal-professional esteem and understanding of self necessary...to build effective relationships with students, parents, and teachers" (p.49). Hamachek (1999) agrees and speaks about helping educators to deepen their self-awareness and become effective in all phases of their work, "We must offer them opportunity, time, and guidance in the direction of becoming mentally healthy, self-aware persons" (pp.217-218).

Specific Middle Level Preparation. Because practicing principals perceived a deficiency in their overall leadership training, we explored their feelings about the added dimension of working in a middle school. After all, encountering elements such as

teaming, flexible block scheduling, advisories and integrated curricula adds to the uniqueness of the culture. Assuming that the mission of the middle school is to meet the developmental needs of young adolescents who are undergoing rapid and complex changes, it seems important that educators receive specific preparation in how to interact with this distinctive age. Presently, most university programs in educational leadership prepare prospective school leaders together, making no distinction between levels--elementary, middle, or secondary. The principals interviewed for this study would like to see that changed. They view middle level education as distinctive. "It pretty much is a whole different animal" (04BM--49/09--6/8U50). Despite their varied backgrounds, many felt similarly and echoed the following comment:

> Well, first of all, they (middle level principals) have to have their own program. Right now you can be a middle level principal with an elementary certificate or a secondary principal certificate and so especially tailored administrative training at the college/university level should be the number one priority. (01WM--50/17--6/8S80)

The results from a national survey conducted by DeMedio and Mazur-Stewart (1990) regarding educators' attitudes toward middle level certification "support the belief that those preparing to teach middle grade students need special middle grade preparation and appropriate middle grade certification" (p.70). While the middle level principals interviewed were not able to reach a consensus regarding this notion of certification/endorsement for administrators, they were able to voice a common concern surrounding their lack of practical middle level preparation.

The reform literature advocates that effective middle level principals support and promote the establishment of structures that address the developmental needs of young adolescents, such as advisory programs, exploratories, teaming of teachers, transition

programs, interdisciplinary teaching thematic units, and flexible block scheduling. Although almost 80% of the principals polled are currently implementing at least five of the six structures mentioned, only 46% have had *some* training in *some* of the areas. The unfortunate reality, as one respondent so bluntly stated, is "you kind of learn by practice at this level" (05WM--48/01--6/8U45). Others concurred:

> Certainly the training I got did not really address or get into middle school issues at all. (04BM--49/09--6/8U50)

> The hardest thing I learned on the job was that I needed to learn more. I knew that when I got here and started to work with middle school kids that if I was going to be a success at all this, I needed to learn what the kids were all about, and it focused my learning better. I just needed to know what middle school kids were all about, and what techniques worked with them. So I began to focus my learning on that area. (07WM--46/05--7/8S60)

> But there's no specific training for the middle school principal. And a lot of it is on the job experience. So, therefore, I think if they had middle level certification with the appropriate courses and background, I think they (principals) would be stronger for this particular group of youngsters. (13WM--62/28--6/8S60)

> I don't know that being an administrator *per se* is good enough training to jump into middle school. There really needs to be pre-curricular activities or courses to let you understand the things you learn on the job. I think it's very difficult to learn unless you're immersed in it. So in some way you must see the model in action. I think to read a book or to take a course in it and not be involved in it is very difficult. (14WM--51/03--7/9S60)

Results of this study indicate that middle level principals are seeking better preparation and professional development specifically geared to effectively administering a middle school. They are requesting specific preparation dedicated to the concept of structuring educational programs to meet the unique developmental needs of early adolescents. They are searching for opportunities to learn about themselves and their particular leadership styles. In so doing, they offer two major pre-service suggestions for institutions of higher education: 1)

train middle level leaders together in a supportive cohort style, and 2) provide real, meaningful middle school internships for prospective administrators and professors alike. Advocating for a cohort model, one principal commented, "I'd like to see middle level principals trained together...to be able to relate the problems and look at what have been solutions in other schools, and one of the pieces that would be helpful for me would be to meet with principals in a similar sized district" (02WF--54/12--5/8R35). On the subject of internships, two principals noted:

> I think they should have to do an intern period...in a middle school. I really think that you can't learn this job from a book, you have to be in the job, and nobody really understands that until they've spent some time seeing the job. (02WF--54/12--5/8R35)

> I think people need to get out and need the opportunity to see what the job's about, maybe a little more job shadowing...spend time...sit and talk...observe. When I was in training there wasn't any of that. They need to have the time to observe what's going on in a school, to get a feel of what that principal does. Um, maybe have some kind of a program where the pre-service people can ask principals questions...Uh, but they need to get in and see what the job's all about. (15WM--51/03--7/9S60)

Even fairly new principals see these two pre-service suggestions as important in that "many of the things needed to be effective cannot be taught in any course...they're not something that anybody can teach you in an administrative course because every school is unique" (06WF--48/03--6/8U65). Then, once they are working as principals, the participants suggest that professional associations take a more active role in providing valuable professional growth opportunities.

Professional Organizational Involvement

Having addressed the "when, where, and how" dilemmas for future middle level principals, the questions regarding practicing administrators remain. Principals once

trained to be managers are now expected to be leaders. Despite these role changes, many school districts and professional organizations provide little opportunity for principals to learn what they need to know to implement reform at the school and classroom level. As Neufeld (1997) points out, the work of school leaders is becoming "more ambitious and more ambiguous. What counts as good curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment is distinctly different than what counted as good 10 years ago" (p.490). A principal with 12 years administrative experience verifies that "this job has changed tremendously in the last 15 to 20 years" (02WF--54/12--5/8R35). This is important, especially because 79% of the principals who participated in this research (not unlike their colleagues) were professionally prepared in the 1970s and/or 1980s. Since that time, roles and relationships between teachers and principals and between schools and central offices have changed tremendously with respect to power and authority (Gainey, 1994; Murphy, 1994; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

Administrators want to understand leadership as an idea and as a set of practices, a process to develop and accomplish the tasks. Personal and professional updates are needed. Organizations and associations need to increase the frequency and accuracy of their training for administrators presently serving in middle schools. While 70% of the principals surveyed belong to NASSP and 60% to ASCD, only 37% are members of NMSA, the leading national organization for middle level educators. There seems to be a disconnect between principals and the organizations focused specifically to the middle level. Participants report that:

> And you have a wide range of students from "A to Z" with different abilities. And dealing with that. That's a difficult nut to crack. And you combine that with the fact that we're in an urban setting. A lot of schools that you go to when you're at the middle school conferences, the presenters, the ideal middle

> schools...that's suburbia. That's the wealthy part of the cities, or that's suburbia. It's not even rural for the most part. ...they do not have the wide range of kids to deal with. (04BM--49/09--6/8U50)

> Again, we have been through lots of different stages here. The truth is that there is really nothing new in all of this. We happened to attend the National Middle School Conference in Colorado, and they were celebrating the 30th anniversary of middle school reform. It was interesting, because they were revisiting everything that we already do. And for me, it was a confirmation for what I have internalized in my professional life. It was reaffirming, but also, not disturbing--kind of interesting how we strayed away, and now we need to come back. (08BF--47/01--6/8S60)

In the same breath, many of the participants recognize the importance of the conferences, presentations, and association offerings and testify to this fact. They speak about needing further knowledge and skill in the meaning and practice of leadership, in creating a beneficial school culture, in understanding the newly proposed approaches to teaching and learning, and in assessing progress toward school improvement. They want to increase their understanding of themselves and their leadership styles.

They look to their professional organizations to help them develop a greater sense of efficacy, a sense that they are capable of learning, improving, and gaining insights. They would like to see national, regional and state middle level associations consider collaborative efforts in establishing approved programs that would meet administrative standards while simultaneously addressing relevant and practical learning opportunities.

> What I started to do as an administrator was I focused my inservice training on leadership. I took a lot of inservice training on leadership, and then almost everything I did was focused on middle school. Anything that was sponsored by the National Middle School Association, I attended. Anything sponsored by ASCD, specific to middle level education...I bugged the living daylights out of the Turning Points people. They were a tremendous guide along the way. (07WM--46/05--7/8S60)

> Number one, I think the districts who do not let the principals out, neither one year or two years to attend National conferences, um, are not staying current. They're doing their principals a major disservice. I think conferences are very,

> very important. Um, certainly school districts should allow that to happen. (13WM--62/28--6/8S60)

> Um, I think, um, there should be a requirement to go to conferences. Like the state level middle school conference. And they should look at best practices and relate them to the models we use in our buildings. (14WM--56/06--6/9S90)

Concluding Discussion

If, indeed, educational excellence is inextricably linked with effective school leadership, there is much to be gained from studying the experiences of school leaders. More specifically, given the virtual absence of research specific to middle school leaders, this study and others like it provide us with the opportunity to learn from individuals as they live out their professional lives in schools. The administrators in this study shared with us their views, their hopes, and their frustrations; we believe that we learned much from them. Table 3 presents what we discovered in comparison to Bauck's (1987) re-analysis of the NASSP data on middle level principals.

Table 3: Principal's Identified Skills and Knowledge Necessary for Success: 1987 Compared to 2000

VARIABLES RELATED TO SUCCESS	Bauck (1987)	Anfara et al. (2000)
1. Formal education has no bearing on principal effectiveness	X	X
2. Participation in professional organizations unrelated to effectiveness	X	X
3. Positive outlook about their work: High job satisfaction	X	X
4. Teacher oriented	X	X
5. Encourage parent/community involvement	X	X
6. Tenure (years in principalship) directly related to effectiveness	X	
7. Uses time efficiently	X	
8. Ability to work with people and respond to multiple expectations	X	
9. Lead schools having larger enrollments located in larger communities with higher per pupil expenditures	X	
10. A variety of course offerings in the middle school	X	
11. Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty		X
12. Ability to assemble a dedicated and capable staff		X

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Interestingly, participants in the current study exhibited a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty that was not noted in the meta-analysis conducted by Bauck (1987). Perhaps never before has the role of the principal been so ambiguous; early principal preparation programs prepared individuals to be THE leader in the school—to be decision-makers, to be "in charge" of their schools. For at least fifteen years, the teacher education literature has been replete with calls for teacher empowerment, site-based decision-making, and shared leadership. Perhaps the changing nature of teaching and teachers has influenced the nature of the effective principal; this certainly bears further study.

In addition, middle school reform calls for schools where administrators and teachers work as colleagues to create governance structures that allow them to share decision-making and provide opportunities for success to all middle level learners. As teachers have been encouraged to find their own voices, to exercise the authority that results from their knowledge of students, content, and pedagogy, have they challenged the authority of the principal? The principals in this study, working to assemble a dedicated and capable staff, expected to share responsibilities and successes with the teachers in their buildings. Future studies that address the ways in which principals and teachers negotiate and create processes for shared governance may prove helpful to principals and teachers engaged in the transformation called for in Turning Points and other school reform documents.

Despite their sense that they were not sufficiently nor effectively prepared for the complexities of their roles as middle level principals, the participants in this study seemed to be creating climates that allowed students and teachers to be successful. They were

implementing practices called for in various middle level reform documents, and they were doing so with enthusiasm for the nature of their work and for the relationships they developed with teachers and students. They were, in fact, reaching out to parents and the community to enhance support for students, teachers, and school programs. It seems likely that systematic study of effective middle level principals could provide information that would be helpful in leadership preparation. In fact, we could (perhaps even should) use their experiences and views in shaping curriculum for educational leadership and principal preparation.

Clearly, advocates of middle level education are striving for a more compatible pairing and coordination of the professional preparation needs of their administrators and the organizations designed to support them. "If middle schools truly do address the needs of early adolescents, then our administrators have to be trained to deal with this age group...to understand what those needs are and to tailor curriculum and instruction to their needs" (01WM--50/17--6/8S80). Principals cannot be expected to mold middle level education principles into meaningful programs and experiences without both the theoretically-based knowledge and the practical, performance-based skills deemed necessary to do so. Enhancing the social, emotional, physical, and educational growth of young adolescents while ensuring students a smooth transition from elementary school to high school requires distinctive preparation. The administrators interviewed during this study recognized this. "There need to be some areas of study that address the specific needs of a middle school...there have to be areas where the uniqueness of a middle school is brought up and studied and discussed" (05WM--48/01--6/8U45).

Given this realization, educational administration preparation programs in general need to acknowledge the immense shift in the principal's role in recent years. Issues have become more multifaceted, and situations have become more complex. Leaders now need to be visionaries, constructivists, facilitators, participatory instructors, and advocates, among a host of other qualities not commonly described in traditional textbooks or readily taught in graduate courses. Practical, performance-based skills are vital. Reflective, self-analysis is imperative.

Principals who are serious about reforming their middle schools face a daunting task. They need to reconstruct core ideas about their role, and, therefore, how they spend their time, set their priorities, seek new knowledge and skills, and situate themselves with respect to teachers and others in the educational community. In many respects, the demands on principals are similar to those on teachers who are attempting to become facilitators of students' learning and are rethinking their conceptions of content, pedagogy, and assessment. The process is complicated, takes time, and requires models of good practice. With the widespread and serious efforts given to revising programs in educational administration there needs to be a recognition of the unique qualities of middle schools (see Table 4).

Table 4: The Evolution of Middle Level Principal Preparation Programs

GENERALIZED COMPONENTS OF CURRENT PREPARATION PROGRAMS 20th CENTURY (From)	RECOMMENDED PRACTICES TO PREPARE MIDDLE LEVEL LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (To)
Generally no distinction among preparation for elementary, middle level and secondary principalship ⇨	Preparation programs with specific courses focused on the middle level and its uniqueness; extended middle level internships field experiences
Early adolescence as a developmental period viewed as not important to the development of programs, curriculum, or instruction ⇨	"Developmental appropriateness" used as a template in the development of all components and functioning of a middle school
Recognizes content as a need and curriculum as "what is" Uncoupling of administration from teaching and learning ⇨	Understands and applies the components of flexible block scheduling, integrated curriculum, advisory programs, small learning communities, team teaching, etc.; Aware of the need to address both cognitive and affective domains of the learner Reconnecting administration to teaching and learning
Pre-service principals "trained" to be aware of trends in education and to respond to needs ⇨	Establishes the principal as a life-long learner; emphasizes the central role that inservices and professional organizations provide; emphasizes the importance of the principal as "risk-taker"
Trained to manage and efficiently administer a school ⇨	Prepares principal to be collaborative in one's approach to leading; to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty
Maintenance of organizational infrastructure ⇨	Development of human resources
Excellence is a "state of being" ⇨	Excellence is a "state of becoming"

The middle level principals participating in this study advocate for administrative preparation and personal/professional development that is thorough, challenging, and meaningful. They propose supportive middle level cohort structures and apprentice-like internships that are instructive, guided, and developmental. They are requesting numerous opportunities to delve deeply, to take risks, to explore new skills, to review impact, and to discuss possible refinements. Middle level principals are challenging their graduate preparation programs and professional organizations to provide such experiences and exposure that will support their quest to be viable, life-long learners

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cognizant of their own thoughts, feelings and actions. In the end, they are grateful for the chance and the process to "seek interpretations and give voice to what they know [and still need to know] by virtue of their experience, combined with close and disciplined examination of their practice" (Freeman, 1996, p.107).

Appendix A

Interviewees' Identification Key

(8 character code used to identify the source of verbatim quotes)

1st character = **PARTICIPANT'S NUMBER**	Ranges from 01 to 17 total participants
2nd character = **RACE**	W = White B = Black H = Hispanic A = Asian
3rd character = **GENDER**	M = Male F = Female
4th character = **AGE**	Ranges from 35 to 65 years old
5th character = **ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE**	Ranges from 01 to 30 years experience
6th character = **GRADE LEVELS WITHIN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL**	5 = Fifth 6 = Sixth 7 = Seventh 8 = Eighth 9 = Ninth
7th character = **LOCATION OF SCHOOL**	U = Urban S = Suburban R = Rural
8th character = **NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL**	Ranges from 20 to 100 teachers

(E.g. 07WM-46/05-7/8S60 = The seventh participant is a white male, 46 years of age with five years administrative experience. His middle school consists of seventh and eighth graders, it is located in the suburbs, and he has sixty teachers working for him.)

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